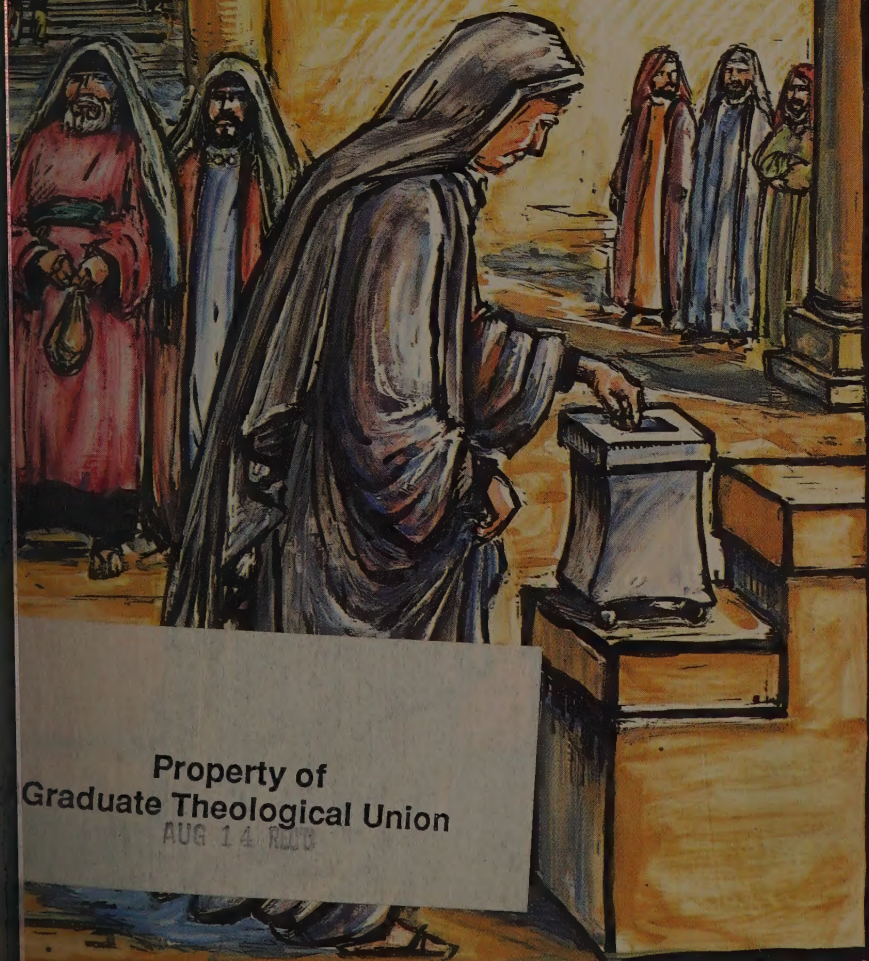


LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

SEPTEMBER
1991

Stewardship



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Cover meditation ♦♦

Sometimes I think I'll be 110 before I learn certain truths about being a follower of Jesus.

Take stewardship, for example. When I was a child and earned 50 cents, my parents told me that I should tithe. I did give my nickel, but I remember having trouble parting with what I considered "my money" (though it was easier than when I earned 25 cents and agonized over whether 2 cents or 3 cents constituted my tithe). "Remember the widow's mite," my parents advised.

Soon I came to see that tithing and stewardship are not the same thing—another lesson from my parents. At age 12, using my talent to play the piano at Sunday school was part of my stewardship.

Over the years my ideas about stewardship have grown. Managing time and energy are the areas I have most difficulty with. Being a good steward means that rather than trying to do everything, I must preserve, protect and renew myself.

Helping others to reach their potential is also part of what I claim as my stewardship. By sharing what I have with others, and by valuing and affirming them, I can stand with

them and help them as they grow self-esteem.

Stewardship of the earth's sources is a new concern for me. It has become clear that the earth and its resources will remain for future generations only if we manage the earth carefully—one of the first commands of a loving God who shapes us from that same earth's dust.

I have also become more mindful of my own influence. This gift, hand in hand with stewardship, is God's creation. All of us influence the people we encounter daily. We can even change the course of the earth by influencing people who make change happen in government and society. We can write members of Congress to press for cleaner air, for feeding the hungry in the world, for more just systems and structures. It is possible. And so is stewardship.

I am not yet 110, but I am slowly learning that stewardship is the offering of my whole life to a gracious God. God asks that of me—and of us. Better yet, God provides us in Jesus—both the will and way to be ready stewards. ■

Esther Arne

Fayetteville, North Carolina

ON THE COVER: "The Widow's Mite," ink and watercolor by Barbara Knutson, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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For the benefit of Women of the ELCA participants, articles relating to Women of the ELCA mission areas are marked with these symbols: action, ☉ = community and ☐ = growth. This issue explores stewardship, a Women of the ELCA program aim which reads: "Respond to God's grace by valuing self and others and by sharing responsibly in the stewardship of God's creation."

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An Apology

The photographs which accompanied the article on bachelor parties in the June 1991 issue of *Lutheran Woman Today* were intended to show men in wedding ties and have no association with the wedding referred to by the author. The article reflects the views of the author and not those of the men in the photograph. The magazine regrets any confusion arising from readers believing the photographs represented the men described in the article and apologizes to those pictured for any offense or embarrassment that has resulted.

Nancy J. Stelling, editor

Letter to Issue

"Team Fulfilled" (May 1991 LWT) was of particular interest to me. Loraine Madsen mentioned she had never seen a woman pallbearer at a funeral—until she herself was able to serve.

Two years ago, when my 92-year-old mother passed away, she left two sons and seven daughters. At her funeral, the two oldest brothers and one sister led the funeral procession and the other six daughters were the pallbearers! Yes, maybe other people were a bit shocked, but we were happy . . . to do this last bit of service for our dear mother.

My daughter-in-law remarked, "You carried you and brought you into this world, so it seems fitting you carry her as she leaves this world."

*Grace Ingulsrud
Forest Lake, Minnesota*

I am really excited about the June issue! When I first saw the front cover with all its roles for men listed, I wondered, "What's up?" As I thumbed through the magazine I noticed that eight of the lead articles were written by men.

At our men's Bible study and prayer fellowship in our church the next day, I challenged our members to borrow their wife's copy and read it. Years ago . . . I started reading my wife's *Scope* and studying its Bible study. I have maintained my separate subscription to *Scope*, and since to LWT, and have continued the Bible study.

I have long felt that as far as our last two or three synod headquarters were concerned, they considered us men either so good that we didn't need any help, or so helpless there was no help for us. I am encouraged our ELCA allowed a men's auxiliary to be reborn. I am very thankful for this bonus edition of LWT.

*Palmer Halverson
Jackson, Minnesota*

As a retail manager, married mother of two grown children, member of a Lutheran woman's circle and citizen of the developing suburbs of the Washington [D.C.] region, I feel that your magazine speaks in a homogenized, milk-toast way, with midwestern outlook, to my life in this area of the country.

I feel you are going overboard in giving us good-feeling theology and avoiding discussion of the really hard issues. You . . . have not had any articles that deal with the Persian Gulf war, about those with children or spouses serving our country in the

military . . . about patriotism and decision making . . . about women out of work because of the recession. . .

My son is currently helping to provide security escort service out of Turkey for the refugee relief efforts. To see your [May] cover with happy-go-lucky children of the world makes me disgusted [enough] to consider that possibly you out there in Chicago have your heads in the sand.

*Ruth E. Stierna
Haymarket, Virginia*

Most of the May LWT is excellent reading, but in the article "Vineyard with a Vision," [we object] to the word *gay*, because there is no clarification of the actions of the gay person.

People may be of gay orientation, but that does not mean that they must act upon their desires, nor inflict their lifestyle on others as a norm. . . . God does not condone this sin and never has. We wish that Ms. Anderson would have dealt more clearly with this issue in her otherwise well-written article.

*Myrna Anderson and
Women of the ELCA,
Bethany Lutheran Church
Cushing, Minnesota*

Letter to Letter

A letter in the May issue spoke strongly against the pronunciation help for the word *ecumenism*.

I feel the Lutheran church already has the reputation of being an intellectual church. There is a danger of becoming exclusive on the basis of intelligence. That letter is an example of the feeling that Lutherans are too smart to need dictionary helps. Romans 15:1 says: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. . . ."

There are different kinds strengths. Intelligence is only one them. What about the woman who can't pronounce *ecumenism*? How does she feel after reading that letter? A slight twinge of shame? May that she's not good enough?

Leave the pronunciation helps for those who appreciate them and let everyone else just skip them when they're reading.

*Char Stone
Shumway, Illinois*

It saddens me to read a letter by Dottie Ness's in the May 1991 issue. To read the February 1991 LWT, full of articles about brotherly love and the bringing together of all God's children in the name of God's love and then to say that it is heretical to share the Lord's words with our brothers and sisters who do not believe as we do is very sad.

It seems to me that these "pagans" would be the very ones God would want his words and love shared with most. To let them know and share our Lord might help them to find the one true God. Or, at least see how lucky we as Christians are to have God who loves us *all*.

*Rochelle Anderson
Gorman, California*

Deadline approaches for special insert

The countdown is on: Only one more issue until LWT's November 1991 edition, with its 16-page insert on women and children who live in poverty. In order not to miss this special "working resource," subscribe by August 25. (See inside back cover for subscription blank.)

Thankfulness

An Apostolic Afterthought?

Edward H. Schroeder

“And—oh yes—be thankful.”

These words, tacked on almost as an afterthought, are a loose translation of the apostle Paul's words in Colossians 3:15—his well-known advice about new life in Christ.

Thankfulness an afterthought? For Christians, that can hardly be true. Or can it? Before we answer, let's examine some New Testament accents on *gratitude*, *thanksgiving*, and *being grateful*—all biblical words that are variations on one “loaded” biblical Greek word, *eucharistia* (meaning “good grace”—more about that later).

G*ratITUDE*. First off, let it be said that gratitude is not an attitude in the New Testament. Nor is it something we do because of the way we feel. It is, rather, an action, a public event. The gospel calls us to thankfulness regardless of how we feel about things, including our feelings about ourselves or about those who receive our gratitude.

So, for example, the New Testament Greek term *agape* is not a feeling or attitude of warm fuzzies toward someone. Instead *agape* is the word that describes concrete help given to someone in need, despite how we might feel about that person. The meaning of *agape* becomes clear when our Lord bids us to love our enemies, to do genuine good for those whom we clearly don't like. Even if people are out to “do us in,” we are called to be Christ's agent and do good for them. So it isn't gratitude, but something else, that motivates people to “do love.”

Thankfulness. The same is true for thankfulness. Thankfulness is, in fact, an “after-thought” in that it comes *after*, or *second*, in the sequence of

The gospel calls us to
thankfulness regardless of
how we feel about things.

Thankfulness

Christian living. *Faith* comes first. It is important to get that sequence straight and understand the reason for it. Let me illustrate what I am talking about with an example from my childhood.

At Trinity Lutheran Church in rural Coal Valley, Illinois, where I grew up, we sang an old hymn each year during Lent that had Jesus saying these words to us: "I gave My life for thee; What hast thou giv'n for Me?" That hymn brought shudders to me every time I heard it. It shattered. For no matter how hard I tried, my "gratitude attitude" was trivial when compared to Christ's cross.

Thankfulness is, in fact, an
"after-thought" . . . in the
sequence of Christian
living. *Faith* comes first.

Christ had done so much for me, the hymn reverberated, and now it was my turn. And it sure sounded to me as if Christ was asking for equity. When instructed that I should do this or that "out of gratitude," I could only look inside myself and verify that, sure enough, I

was "out of" gratitude. Not just fresh out. Constantly out.

Through years of grappling with God's gospel, I now know the missing link in the sequence from that piece of childhood piety: *faith*. I knew Christ had done all that stupendous stuff for me, but somehow it didn't seem to count if I didn't fork over something equally comparable in return. My constant dilemma was that I was out of gratitude. Small wonder—faith was missing!

Thankfulness is not, strictly speaking, a response to the gospel. Faith is—and the only proper one. The gospel does indeed call for a response. But the response it calls for is this: *Trust me*. The Lutheran confessions hold that the gospel is a promise. But before we can give thanks for promises, we have to trust the promises. Gratitude is a *consequence* of trusting. So the Christian sequence is, rightly: Christ's promise to us, our trusting that promise, then the fruits of faith—a veritable garden of them—one of which is "and—oh yes—be thankful."

My move from childhood piety to understanding later in life is the switch from what, in theology, we call *law-imperatives* to *grace-imperatives*. Or, more simply put, from law-commands to grace-commands. Both commands issue from

Thankfulness

God, so we dare not say that people initiate the law-commands, while God initiates the other kind. No, both come from God. The big difference is that Christ is in the second set, and not in the first set. And what a colossal difference that is! Law-commands have a prior condition to them: "If you do this for God, then God will do that for you." Remember the lawyer in Luke 10 who wanted something from God—eternal life—but kept trying to justify himself, finally asking, in effect, "Who is this neighbor I am supposed to love?" In the Good Samaritan parable that follows, Jesus is trying to tell him—and all of us who will listen—that God-in-Christ acts first, justifying all of us who are "half-dead" in our sins. Then are we freed, and grace-filled, to see that we are neighbors to all kinds of people. We can perform actions of thankfulness and helpfulness, in faithful response to God and on behalf of others.

For in the grace-commands, Christ is primary and comes first. The commands that follow Christ are the *consequence*—not the *condition*—of the divine action. The grace commands read like this: "Since God-in-Christ did such-and-so, therefore you do so-and-such." Listen to the pattern in this classic grace-command: ". . . in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. . . . [therefore] on behalf of Christ, be reconciled. . . ." (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

Law-commands are
something we've "got to do."
Grace commands are
something we "get to do."

But we are not called upon to do something for Jesus. Jesus is not the beneficiary in the action commanded. Nor are we the beneficiaries. As in the parable of the Good Samaritan, *other people are the beneficiaries of those actions*. (Compare Ephesians 2:13-22.) And all of the action issues out of God's grace-initiative, flowing from folks who trust it.

The law-commands are something we've *got* to do; the grace-commands are something we *get* to do." The former involves coercion, the latter has no coercion, except Christian freedom! The former lays assignments upon us with built-in sanctions; the latter opens new doors for innovative sanctification. We get to choose the good we are eager to do for another! Thanksgiving is one of the grace-commands

that no one can really tell us how to do, though conversation within the Christian community can help shape us as we seek to do our faith-filled response.

Perhaps the earlier attack on the “gratitude attitude” was overstated. Attitudes are important for how we live and act. But if our attitudes, even our grateful ones, remain only inside us and are linked to how we feel, then Christian thanksgiving is not yet happening.

The book of Psalms grasps the point well when, in Psalms 106, 107 and others, it repeatedly advises us to “go public” with our faith-filled response: “Oh, give thanks to the Lord.” Why? “For God is good.” How good? Good enough that “God’s mercy endures forever.” Thanksgiving really is an after-thought, for it is *after* encountering God’s mercy in Christ, and trusting it, that we go public. In biblical thanksgiving, there is always an audience, for someone outside the

thanksgiver is on the receiving end when thanksgiving happens.

**Thanksgiving is one of the
grace-commands that no one
can really tell us how to do.**

Remember the term *eu-charistia* mentioned earlier? When we unpack the word, we find it means “good grace,” from *eu* (good) and *charistia*

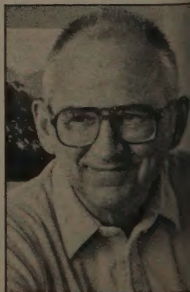
(grace). When we as sinners begin to trust Christ and see in Christ God’s move toward us in grace, then all is good. And we receive that goodness “with thankfulness,” as Paul says in Colossians 3:16, as a grace gift. And we “go public.”

Even if no one thinks to ask us what is going on, we can tell them anyway. Look what God-in-Christ has done for us! God gives us gifts in our lives. We receive them and we can give them away.

Thanksgiving is one Christian proposal for going public with what has been private experience. It’s no big deal. It’s simply faith in action proceeding from the center of our being to the edges of all the crazy-quilt patchworks that are our lives.

Or as the apostle Paul might have put it, “Oh, yes—by the way—be thankful.” ■

The Rev. Dr. Edward Schroeder teaches in the Crossings Community, based in St. Louis, Missouri. Crossings focuses on theological education for ministry in daily life.



FAITHFUL STEWARDS:

Cultivating Loving Relationships

Anne Marie Nuechterlein

God calls us to be faithful stewards—not only with our money, but in all dimensions of our relationships. In fact, the word “steward” in Scripture comes from the Greek word *oikos*, which means “house” and refers to the community of God.

God’s house is found not only in our churches, but wherever people nurture and build up one another in love. When God calls us to be stewards, God invites us to embrace one another—our families, our friends, our neighbors, and the people with whom we interact in the places we live. Our stewardship develops in the context of our relationships. To *do* stewardship means to *be* in loving relationships with God, with ourselves, and with one another.

Loving God

We love God and want to give fully of ourselves to God because of God’s great gift to us in Jesus’ living, dying and rising for us. Jesus is the model giver, and gives us the power to be stewards who cultivate and nurture healthy relationships.

Like all healthy relationships, our relationship with God involves trust. Through God’s power, we seek to trust God’s deep love, forgiveness and acceptance. When we trust God, we talk with God about our needs and listen to God’s words to us. And our relationship with God involves believing God’s love for us. To understand God’s love for us we need to recall our Baptism. In and through Baptism, God chose us and claims us. When Jesus was baptized, God proclaimed from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew



God’s house is found not only in our churches, but wherever people nurture and build up one another in love.

By remembering our Baptism daily,
we allow God to renew us with
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3:17). When we are baptized, God is also proclaiming: This is my beloved daughter, with whom I am well pleased. By remembering our Baptism daily, we allow God to renew us with all the strength and hope of God's promises.



Like many of us, Leslie, baptized as an infant, is active in her church and committed to God. Yet Leslie struggles with believing that God loves and forgives her. Because she wants to know God's love for her and to deepen her relationship with God, she decides to repeat to herself the promises that God made to her in Baptism. When she wakes up in the morning and before she goes to bed at night, she says these words of God to herself, "I am God's beloved daughter, with whom God is well pleased" and "God gives me new life in Christ, and loves and forgives me for all my sins."

When we repeat phrases to ourselves—positive or negative—we slowly begin to believe them. Leslie had so often concentrated on her sins and repeated negative phrases from Scripture to herself that she believed she was a terrible Christian. When Leslie realized that she was not trusting God's love for her, she prayed that God would help her speak and believe God's words of love and forgiveness for her. By beginning to recall the positive words of God's ever-present love and forgiveness, Leslie came to believe that Jesus loves her, forgives her and accepts her *as she is*.

Loving Ourselves

Being faithful stewards of God's gifts involves loving ourselves. We need time alone, time to reflect about who we are as a person, a unique and precious child of God.

In order to do so, we need to create a hospitable space for ourselves to *be* rather than to *do*. We need to be quiet, to listen. We need to be alone with ourselves. We need to be open to God.

How has God gifted you? In what ways can you nurture and support these gifts and yourself in the process? What are your needs and longings?

As we seek to be faithful stewards of God's gift of ourselves, we need to keep in touch with our inner thoughts and feelings. Leslie learned that. We, too, need to feel a sense of connection and wholeness with ourselves as indi-

viduals. By listening to our inner beings, we can be more clear about our needs and seek to meet them in healthy ways.

Loving Others

In response to God's love for us, we also seek to be faithful stewards who cultivate loving relationships with others. We live as faithful members of the community of God when we develop nurturing relationships with people with whom we can express our deepest feelings of hurt, fear, anxiety, excitement, joy and peace. Nurturing relationships warm our hearts, enliven our beings, strengthen our self-esteem, support us when we hurt and renew us in our lives as faithful stewards of God.

As people of God, we need to feel connected with others. We cannot live in isolation from one another. We could *exist* without relationships, but that would be a dull, dreary existence. We live a vibrant, spirited life when we experience loving relationships. While relationships can cause us pain and turmoil, they can also bring much joy and satisfaction.

In the movie "Dances with Wolves," John J. Dunbar lives by himself at a deserted army post on the frontier. While he *exists* on his own with his horse, Cisco, and a wolf, he *lives* a much fuller, richer life when he develops relationships with the neighboring Sioux tribe. The Sioux tribe becomes his family and community, and deeply enriches his life. As John J. Dunbar discovers, caring relationships help us know a sense of family and community with one another, and give our lives beauty and depth.

Stewardship is about relationships. As faithful stewards, God calls us to relate with others in genuine, life-giving ways. We want to live in loving relationships of trust and mutuality with others, and give and receive support and nurture to others in the community of Christ. And it is God who empowers us to cultivate relationships with people with whom we can be authentic. In so doing, we discover our hopes, goals, and dreams, as well as a clearer sense of our identity as faithful stewards in the community of God. ■

Dr. Anne Marie Nuechterlein is associate professor of contextual education at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. She has a Ph.D. in marriage and family therapy and has served as deaconess, campus minister, and parish pastor. She and her husband, Dana Thalheimer, have a baby daughter, born in April.



God's "S" Prompt

Donna Hacker Smith

How many dishes would there be? I wondered.

Somehow I had managed to provide a Christmas dinner for 10 adults and five children, a feat I had never before accomplished. I was pleased with the day. No if only I could find my kitchen counters, buried somewhere under the debris.

"Hey! Grandma!" A voice from behind me caught my attention. It was Lindsay, my 3½-year-old stepgranddaughter.

"Hey, what do you want?" I replied.

She grinned shyly. "I want *you*," she said.

"I want *you*!" Her quiet voice drove away my preoccupation with the appearance of my kitchen. Somebody wanted me. Somebody I loved a great deal was demanding my presence. This was not a moment of childish petulance. It was, rather, a moment of God's grace. And as I sank into the sofa with Lindsay curled up on my lap, I realized it was, also, a moment of stewardship.

Yes—*stewardship*! Like most Lutherans at one time or another, I used to think that stewardship was a call of pledging a reasonably generous amount of money to the church. And by keeping that pledge, I was exercising good stewardship, wasn't I?

Not necessarily! I have come to learn, and partly through people like Lindsay, that stewardship is more often a case of listening to God's prompts to give, and being ready to respond.

Stewardship means listening for God's word that I am to give of myself to others. "Pastor, do you have a minute?" can be a true "S" prompt, a call for an act of stewardship. Occasionally a parishioner's statement, "You are too busy, Pastor—really—don't worry about coming to see me," brings me up short. At those times I have been projecting the wrong image, one of a steward whose personal time is too valuable to be spent on even the Master's purposes. When I lose track of how my Lord would have me spend myself, I am reminded of God's will through the voices of others.



"Hey!

Grandma! I want you," she said. Somebody I loved a great deal was demanding my presence.

few years ago when we were visiting my step-
daughter's family in San Diego, another stepgrand-
daughter, Samantha, begged me to read her some bed-
stories. Tired from a day of sightseeing, I rather
reluctantly consented. We settled on her bed and I be-
gan to read. By the third book, the reading had become
tiresome and I wondered if she would ever become sleepy.
Just as I resigned myself to another book, Samantha
suddenly reached up her hand to touch my cheek and
said, "I love you, Grandma."

"I love you, too," I responded. What a great lesson
in stewardship God has taught me through these
children! My gestures of giving are never as generous
as I would wish. Reading a story or cooking a dinner
cannot change the world, or win it over for the Lord.
God rewards my weak efforts with gifts I could
never "earn" on my own. So with stewardship: our too-
limited ability to give is met with incalculable
rewards. The giver so easily becomes the gifted!

Stewardship is also God prompting me to take care
of my time and self. "I can't take time to be sick;
it's too important!" my inner voice tells me. Yet an illness
as mild as a cold can be a reminder that I have
been neglecting myself.

At the times when I am sure that I am the prime
valuer of those around me, God comes with gentle
reminders that I am God's own, not *my* own. All that I
or ever will be is a resource at God's disposal—an
instrument to fulfill God's loving will. If I do not exercise
wisdom, I abuse what God has provided me in order
to serve.

We need to hear God's prompts to stewardship, re-
minding us that all we are—or ever will be—is found
in God's own plan, not in our limited agendas. God
does not want our 10 percent, our token gifts, or our
theatrical demonstrations of self-sacrifice, *unless* they
are founded upon a genuine response to the call "I want

you!" God says. And when we respond and
give ourselves, there come rewards and gifts of
grace that we human beings could never imagine. ■

*Rev. Donna Hacker Smith, pastor of Prince of Peace
Lutheran Church in Freeport, Illinois, alternates with
Rev. Melang as columnist for "Give Us This Day."*



Samantha
reached up her
hand to touch
my cheek and
said, "I love you,
Grandma."

. . . The giver so
easily becomes
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WAR

and the Earth

Diane Balin

Many Christians are becoming increasingly aware of our God-given duty to be faithful stewards of creation. The command of Genesis 2:15 to "till [the garden] and keep it" rings in our ears.

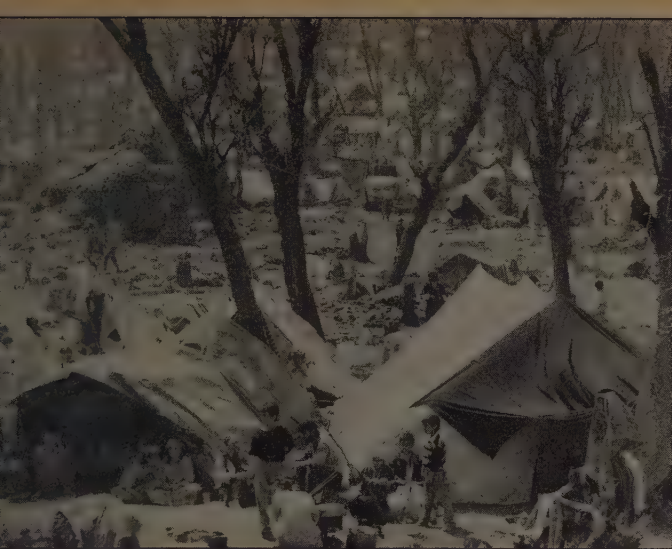
Yet humankind has seldom been a faithful caretaker of creation; during times of conflict, we seem to be even more forgetful of God's command. In the Beatitudes, peacemakers are called the children of God. But what does God call us when we wage war on each other? And have we stopped to give thought to the effects wars are having on God's gift to us—the earth?

Recent events in the Persian Gulf remind us that all is *not* fair in war. We have come to respect certain codes of behavior in times of war, and we call breaches of these codes "crimes against humanity." But who will convict us of crimes we commit during war that are crimes against the earth—God's creation? Maiming, death and destruction are only the immediate effects of war; the ecological damage we have done will be felt for generations to come.

The earth tries desperately to heal itself of the scars re-

ceived when we human beings wage war. Where once there was only death and destruction, new plant growth and life spring up. But with each new onslaught of increasingly deadly war technology, nature is having less and less success rebounding from our blows. Those who know how to read the landscape notice the stunted growth that attempts to cover destroyed buildings, and the battlefields that are never rich in diversity or as mature in stature as vegetation in unaffected areas. A careful explorer of Civil War battlefields, for instance, still finds remains of earthwork trenches and other alterations to the landscape which nature has not been able fully reclaim.

"Modern" wars have had even more lasting and deadly environmental effects. Construction workers and even children in England occasionally come across unexploded bombs from World War II



Kurdish refugees have stripped the trees in the Isikveren camp to make fires for cooking.

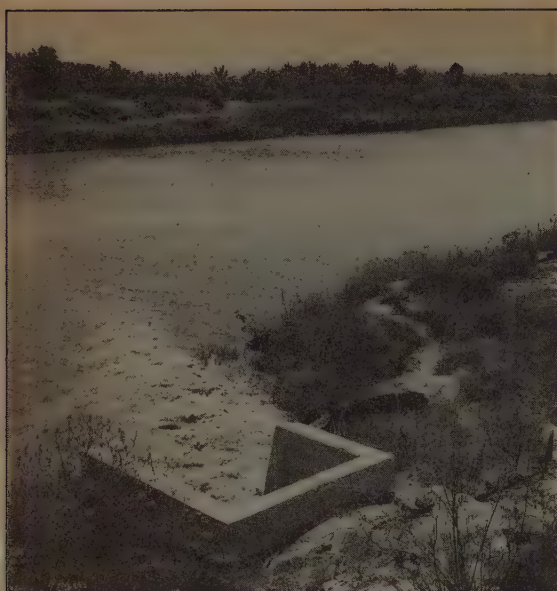
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be given to social services
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man needs. In this sense,
r makes all of us poorer
d less secure, and lowers
quality of life. The cost of
war will not only be paid
he countries who were in-
ved militarily, but also by
rounding countries.

"The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone'. . . . So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man. . . ." (Genesis 2:18-19, New Revised Standard Version). God called forth animal life to enrich creation; yet the very human creation who was given dominion over everything in the air, on land, and in the water, has now heaped incredible devastation on that animal life.

Oil spills in the Persian Gulf have fouled over 100 miles of pristine beaches, salt marshes and tidal waters that once harbored a vital shrimp industry, sensitive bird nesting areas, and feeding grounds for migratory birds.

Cleanup is a slow process, and the full extent of the damage cannot be assessed for years because of the magnitude of the disruption to biological systems and their slow



Raw sewage flows into the Diala River in Baghdad. The sewage-treatment plants have been damaged by war.

recovery rates. "Displaced oil" is not only deadly in water, but also in the air. Thick smoke from burning oil wells has turned day into night as it blocks sunlight from reaching the earth. Potentially, the smoke could contribute to a drop in the earth's surface temperature.

This oily smoke also causes problems when it falls on the land as "black rain," dropping harmful petrochemicals to the earth. Changes in weather systems and polluted rain are also likely to reduce crop production throughout the entire region and contaminate both food and drinking water with cancer-causing chemicals. There is concern that the bombing of nuclear and chemical weapons sites has released toxic materials into the air, water and soil. These derivative materials, including PCBs, are more

persistent and toxic than the original chemical weapons.

Finally, the mere presence of military hardware in the Gulf has caused problems. The weight of military vehicles and tanks compacts soil. In many countries of Africa, critical cropland has already been lost due to soil compaction caused by military activity. Deserts are especially fragile ecosystems; desert ecology is easily degraded because plants cannot grow in compacted soil. The Mojave Desert in the United States and the deserts of Libya still bear the scars of tank tracks from World War II—almost 50 years ago!

Both the natural and human-made environments of the Persian Gulf have been traumatized—people, cultures, cities, water, air and land. How long will the region take to recover, to what degree will it recover, and what will be lost forever?

These are tough questions and tough to answer. But perhaps the real question, in light of the charge God gave to humanity in Genesis 1 and 2, is whether the world can continue to wage wars, especially one more environmental devastation than the last. ■

Diane Balin, Riverside, Illinois, is an environmental teacher-trainer and program presenter who holds a doctorate in counseling and psychology. She is also a mother of three and a member of a Lutheran church in Riverside.

and the Economist

M. Douglas Meeks

Press Press, 1989;

1995, paperback, 258 pp.).

God the Economist

Martin L. Kretzmann

One is tempted to suggest that the label “Beware, this book can be dangerous” be attached to Douglas Meeks’ book “God the Economist.” Why? Because it’s a book that can make you think about your lifestyle and cause you to listen carefully to any sermon claiming to be the Word of God for today’s world.

It will also make you think twice when someone rules a subject out of bounds because it is not “religion,” or when the lid on the little box marked “church” is taken off. Then suddenly “church” is all over the place: in politics, the marketplace, wherever the world impinges on our lives because we are human beings living in God’s world.

Is religion the main subject of the Bible? We have been trained to think that way. However, Douglas Meeks quotes hundreds of Bible passages to show that the Bible is really a book about “life” which, properly understood, *is* religion. Meeks uses the term *oikos* (Greek for “house” or “home”—see the February issue of LWT, “*Oikoumene*”) to describe broadly the “means to livelihood,” claiming that *oikos* is basic to understanding both the church and politics. And Scripture supports that understanding when the Old Testament talks of the “house” of Israel, and the New Testament speaks of the “household” of the church.

The author reads the Bible with fresh eyes and finds wisdom about life and death, good and evil, order and disorder, the governance of the state, the significance of the home—and sees it all as part of

God's economy. He shows how the God language of the Bible and economic language are fundamentally related.

Nothing I have said so far should frighten the prospective reader. Still it would be misleading to say that the book is easy reading. It isn't. Perhaps that is why the author offers a "brief map of our journey." In the first three chapters he describes the situation in North American society and how the church has kept God and economy separated, how theology and political economy might be correlated, and how all this affects our theology and our economy. In an interesting key chapter titled "God the Economist," Meeks traces the biblical basis for using the term *economist* as a metaphor for God.

The final three chapters—about half the book—deal with "God and Property," "God and Work," and "God and Needs." Each chapter examines the current social understanding of its respective term, and then relates it to our confession of God as the Trinity and the communal relationship that exists among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The reader who believes North American society is perfect will find much of Meeks' description of it disturbing. There is, however, no screaming in the book, or even overly loud denunciation. But the quiet way of the author, in which good theology is related to everyday problems, has a way of piercing the mind and heart.

We know there are societies in the world that have value systems quite different from those that seem to predominate in North America. Not all people in our global village believe that the infinite accumulation of this

world's goods is the ultimate goal of life. It is good to find a book that sees the warp and woof of life on a different level—in our relationships to one another, to nature and to God.

It is not likely that the image "God the Economist" will find its way into the church's liturgy. Still, in light of what Meeks says, we can "unpack" our traditional images and terms and search for the full depth and width of meaning they contain.

In the gospel of John we read the delightful story of the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. When she feels Jesus is getting too personal, she changes the subject and talks about a place of worship. Jesus replies "Pneuma O theos," saying that God is spirit and that true worshipers worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). What this means comes through more clearly in one of the final conversations Jesus has with his disciples. Jesus answers Philip's request, ". . . show us the Father" with these words: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:8-9).

One gets the impression from the book that the author has met God the Economist in Jesus, the Carpenter from Nazareth. ■

Martin Kretzmann, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, served for 33 years as a missionary in India, then as a mission staff executive for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He is a member of Capitol Drive Lutheran Church, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation in Milwaukee.

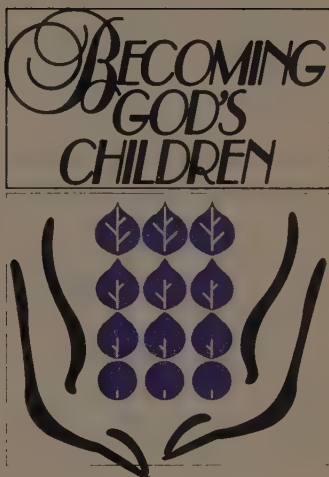


Session 9

Be a
Blessing

Eva and Michael Rogness

Study Text: Genesis 12:1-3



The 20th century has been called “the century of the refugee.” More people have left their homelands since 1900 than ever before in history. That is why the story of Abraham speaks so compellingly to us. Abraham and Sarah emigrated from their home to a new land and theirs is a journey in faith.

Opening Prayer

O gracious God, you called Abraham and Sarah from their home into a new land. In the midst of changes in our lives, guide us with your sure presence. Strengthen our faith and give us the courage to follow your call into new ventures. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Understanding the Word
The Beginning of God's People

Read Genesis 12:1-3. These three verses are among the most important in the Old Testament. God begins a new work among human beings by making a covenant with Abraham. Note that this covenant has four parts:



■ **Part 1** (verse 1): *"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."*

To bring something new into this world, Abraham needed to leave his familiar surroundings. How emphatic are these few words! "Leave your country," God tells him. "Leave your relatives." Even more pointed, "Leave your father's house." In those days, when families lived for generations together, this was like telling Abraham to cut all the ties to his home and family and past life. These were radical changes that God was asking for!

Abraham's response was pure faith. With no guarantee and no assurances, he simply trusted in God's promise and set out. He must have been scared to set out with all his worldly goods in a caravan, headed for a country he knew nothing about. His emotions must have been mixed. Along with the eagerness, anticipation, and excitement of following God's call, there must have been fear, anxiety, uncertainty and the sadness of farewell.

The story doesn't say, but we can imagine that Abraham and Sarah's friends thought they were foolhardy, much like the people who ridiculed Noah for building a boat on dry ground!

1

In what ways is Abraham's story similar to that of a refugee today? In what ways is it different?

■ **Part 2** (verse 2a): *"I will make of you a great nation."*

Abraham must have puzzled over that! He and his wife Sarah were childless, yet off they went following the promise, with no idea how the promise would be fulfilled.

■ **Part 3** (verse 2b): *"I will bless you, and make your name great."*

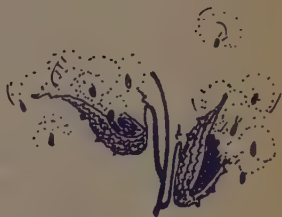
It is normal for us to wonder who will remember us and what they will say about us after our days on this earth have ended. God's promise to Abraham was that he would be the founder of a great nation and a people who would remember him as a man of faith. However, God did not tell him when or how this would happen. Abraham's name was indeed remembered when, centuries later, Paul wrote: "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3).

Part 4 (verse 2c): *"You will be a blessing."*

Being blessed and being a blessing to others are connected in God's promise. How would this come about? Once again, Abraham could not know. Abraham could not know how any one aspect of God's covenant promise would be fulfilled. But he and Sarah set an example of a response of trust and faith.

2

What people in the Bible, or from church history (both ancient and modern), can you name who left familiar surroundings and ventured by faith into the unknown? What do you remember of their stories?



Interpreting the Word **The Covenant of God's People**

God's call to Abraham established Abraham's descendants as the chosen people of the Old Testament. But Abraham and Sarah's story also stands as an example to us, as we too are called by God to live in faith. Let us look again at the four parts of God's promise to see how closely our stories parallel theirs.

Part 1: *"Go from your country."*

Faith is always a venture. Faith in God means to leave something old for a new life. That is not easy. Many of us are uneasy to travel into new areas without advance planning and without knowing what awaits us, though today it is usually easier to turn around and return home than it was in Abraham and Sarah's day.

For Christians, we can compare leaving our old country to the passing of the baptismal waters. By drowning in Baptism, we leave the old life and rise up in the newness of Jesus' resurrection. Baptism here is connected to discipleship, for we believe, as Luther's Small Catechism says, that in Baptism "our sinful self . . . should be drowned through daily repentance; and that day after day a new self should arise."

As disciples, we leave old ways whenever we follow God into a new pattern of living. Discipleship includes both anxiety and excitement, just as the journey did for Abraham and Sarah.

3

Think back to an instance when you have entered a new chapter in your life, and had some kind of promise to sustain and uphold you. What was it like? Share your remembrances, if you wish.

■ Part 2: "I will make of you a great nation."

We long to be part of something greater than ourselves, something that gives meaning to our lives. As Christians we are citizens of something greater than an earthly nation. We are part of the Christian church. What a glorious unity we experience as Christians with the worldwide, centuries-old communion of saints in the church! In a document from the third century, Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, wrote to his friend:

"It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are Christians . . . and I am one of them."

Many of you know Christians from other countries in this world, and you know what a deep and precious bond this marvelous fellowship of Christians is!

■ Part 3: "I will bless you, and make your name great."

We have been blessed by the Word of God made flesh, Jesus our Lord! What a great name we have been given as Jesus' followers: "Christians." John Bunyan's great 17th-century classic, "Pilgrim's Progress," tells about a pilgrim on his way through life. He is coming from the City of Destruction and seeks entry to a stately palace. The porter asks where he is coming from and where he is going.

"I am come from the City of Destruction," answers the pilgrim, "and am going to Mount Zion."

"What is your name?" asks the porter.

The answer is one of the greatest statements in the entire book: "My name is now Christian, but my name at the first was Graceless."

"My name is Christian!" What a wonderful name! And it has become our name.

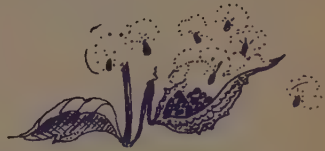
part 4: “. . . so that you will be a blessing.”

Note that God does not say “do” or “give” a blessing, but rather *be* a blessing. First we “become” certain kinds of people—name-people of faith—because we have been blessed by God. Blessings start with God, as the much-beloved verse, John 3:16 tells us: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. . . .” The verse then continues with God’s blessing to us, “that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Once blessed, we become and pass on the blessing to others.

4

What people can you name who have been blessed to you? How have they been a blessing? Share at least one specific exam-

Living the Word **Pilgrims and Sojourners**



We are all refugees in two senses: first, we are pilgrims and sojourners on this earth. Pilgrims are those who set off from a certain place with a destination and purpose. We are sojourners in the sense that we find resting places all along this journey, but we never pitch our tents permanently. Like Christian in “Pilgrim’s Progress,” we too are on our way to Mount Zion.

Second, every time we step out in faith into a new venture, we are following the pattern of Abraham. As God sent Abraham and Sarah to a far country, so God sends us continuously into a life of adventure and uncharted waters.

The very nature of faith is to launch out in trust. Every renewal of faith is to leave the old ways. In Baptism we die to this world, in order that we might live in this world in the newness of being God’s children.

Every time we pray, “Thy will be done,” we are saying, “Show us how to follow your ways of living.”

Every time your congregation ventures forward in a new project or in new forms of service, you are leaving old ways of doing things and responding in faith. We might be fearful and anxious, but we are also challenged and excited.

In 1975, a Minnesota community was experiencing a severe economic decline, like so many others. It received a form letter from Lutheran Social Services about the urgent need to find sponsors for Asian refugee families.

"How will we find them jobs?" members of the community wondered. "We have unemployed people right here in our congregation."

"Where will they live?" others asked. "Apartments are expensive and our church budget is already behind."

So the discussion went, but in the end the community was convinced that the need was so crucial that a willing committee was formed—including even the skeptics. One August day a family of 12 stepped off the plane. The Asians and Americans were equally awkward. Only one of the people who had just arrived spoke some English.

The next years were a rich blessing. The Vietnamese family was blessed by the people in the congregation, and the hosts were richly blessed by the arrival of new friends. Lives were enriched and blessed, because people said, "Let's leave some of our old ways and launch out into new areas of service!"

5

When has your congregation, or members of it, embarked on a new venture in faith, accompanied by uncertainty and eager anticipation? Describe the venture.



Blessed and Blessings

"To bless" and "blessings" are among the most overused clichés in the religious vocabulary. What does it mean to be blessed, and how can we be a blessing to others? We need to rescue this wonderful word from empty usage and restore its rich fabric of meaning. Sunday after Sunday we listen to the final blessing before returning home, "The Lord bless you and keep you . . ." We have a warm feeling when someone says to us, "Bless you," often with only a vague idea what it might mean.

In the Old Testament a blessing had tremendous active power. People were more aware than we are today of the concept that words do not just stand for something else, but carry the very power of what they express. When God spoke the words of creation, those very words brought into being what God said. So it is with blessing. When God says, "You are blessed," the blessing happens as the words are spoken. As we hear the words, "The Lord bless you . . .," the blessing is being conveyed immediately! The words carry the action.

Therefore, in the Old Testament a blessing could not be revoked. Isaac could not take back the blessing he mistakenly gave

Jacob, thinking it was Esau (Genesis 27:32-33). The blessing had been spoken and it was done.

In the Old Testament, parents blessed their children to send them into the future with love and support.

Likewise, this understanding of blessing is part of the cultural heritage of Hispanic families. Before a child learns how to pray, a child is first taught to ask for a blessing from his or her loved ones. The children say, "Blessings" (which literally means "benedictions"), and the adult responds, "May God's blessings be with you always."

There is another important aspect of blessing. Just as Abraham and Sarah are to "be a blessing," so God blesses us to be a blessing to others. We do not just convey or express blessing. Having been blessed, we now *are* a blessing, in active and concrete witness and service, in our families, and in our churches and our communities. [Watch for the January 1992 LWT, which will have blessing as its theme.—ED.]

Looking Ahead

Abraham and Sarah became a blessing to succeeding generations because by following God's call in faith, their life underwent radical change. The topic for Session 10 will be change. We will look at Romans 12:1-2, and consider what changes come into our lives as children of God's creation when we live in God's promise. ■

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Michael Rogness are the Bible study writers for sessions (September through December) of "Becoming God's Children: Cultural Perspectives on Stewardship."

Michael Rogness is currently staff chaplain at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and has written studies for high school students in the church. The Rev. Dr. Michael Rogness, formerly a parish pastor, is professor of pastoral theology and homiletics (preaching) at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota.

The Bible study is edited by Ivis LaRiviere-Mestre. For questions and comments about the Bible study, write to Director for Educational Resources, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189. For comments about articles and other features in LWT, write to "Letters to the Editor," LWT, at the same address.

Jesus Wept

Stories of Grief and Comfort

second in a series

Phyllis N. Kersten

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted"
(Matthew 5:4, King James Version).

Over 180 individuals—some in their circle meetings, most on their own—answered Lutheran Woman Today's call in November 1990 to tell the story of how these words from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount came true for them. The July/August 1991 LWT presented the first sampling of their responses.

In the midst of their mourning, they were comforted—by what friends, neighbors or relatives said, in person or over the phone. They were comforted by what people wrote—in long letters, short notes or on sympathy cards. They received comfort from poetry—sometimes original, sometimes a borrowed verse that had comforted another. And they were frequently comforted, they said, by actions that spoke louder than words.

For example, a woman from Wisconsin told how her dear friend Shirley came to her door after her husband died and said, "I am yours for the day," and proceeded to take phone calls and help with arrangements.

Donna from Minnesota had a similar experience when her mother died. "She was my right arm in almost everything I did," Donna explained, "so I was numb and unable to function properly." But Boni, a high school friend, came "not only with open arms and a listening ear," but "with a notebook with tabs. She organized all of our scattered notes about food, flowers, arrangements."

*"It was like some bad dream repeating itself,
but having someone who wasn't afraid to walk through it
with me made it possible to endure."*

Jesus Wept

was not anything he said. It was something he did. He looked at me with very compassionate eyes and handed me a tissue to dry my tears."

Several women wrote about friends and neighbors who offered room in their homes for out-of-town relatives who came for a funeral. Betty, from Uniondale, New York, expressed appreciation for a friend who "came and spent the night when my sister died."

Susan in Fargo told about the many ways in which her friend Laurie, in her old hometown, helped her when her mother, "the most significant person in my life," died. "She opened her home to me so that I had a place to stay, she packed boxes, she listened for hours while I cried, remembered special moments with me, encouraged me when I felt I couldn't return to work."

Eight months later, when Susan's father died from complications of surgery, "Laurie's arms were open wide" again. "It was like some bad dream repeating itself, but having someone who wasn't afraid to walk through it with me made it possible to endure."

Jacquelyn told about living in Lemon Grove, California, when her father died in Minnesota. "I felt it was impossible to go to comfort mother as I had four children, the youngest three-and-a-half months old, and my husband was an overly busy M.D." Then neighbors—young newlyweds—came over and offered to care for the children. "Would you trust us to do this for you?" they asked. Jacquelyn wrote: "I did!"

Janet from Hobart, Indiana, remembers the simple kindness of a funeral director, Jim, when she was crying at her mother-in-law's casket. "It was not anything he said. It was something he did. He looked at me with very compassionate eyes and handed me a tissue to dry my tears. . . . That very act of kindness did more for me than any words could have."

Ethel from Wisconsin knew about tangible acts of kindness, too, when most of the family dairy herd was killed in a barn fire. A man from town offered the use of his heavy equipment "to dig a pit and bury the cows at no cost to us. A neighbor across the road with an empty dairy barn took the remaining heifers and cows and tinkered with the old watering cups to get them working. . . . Fellow parishioners brought wagon loads of hay and straw."

Tamra, from Minnesota, told of a year filled with terrible
when most of the family dairy herd was killed in a barn fire, a man from town offered the use of his heavy equipment to dig a pit and bury the cows at no cost to us."

Jesus Wept

"Your doubts are normal and are encompassed within your faith—even Jesus doubted. But the good news is this—God has not abandoned you."

uncertainty and loss: family illness, unemployment, financial stress, pregnancy and a new baby, the sale of their home and a move to a new community, away from a supportive church home. She wrote to a pastor-friend in Washington state, Terrie Rae, and shared her feelings of being abandoned by God and doubting God's presence in her life. Terrie Rae called her a short time later to offer this support and encouragement: "Your doubts are normal and are encompassed within your faith—even Jesus doubted. But the good news is this—God has not abandoned you. He is with you through the people he puts in your life." Tamra said that call helped her remember all the many "people who could do nothing to fix my situation but did everything possible to help me through it."

A woman from Mankato, Minnesota, talked about the comfort she received from her former neighbor and friend, Jan, after her husband died. "She came to town for aerobics once a week. After the class she came over to my house. We had coffee and talked. I will never forget those evenings."

What were some of the specific words that proved to be a blessing?

Alvina, from Minnesota, said it was the words "so sorry" on a sympathy card she received from her friend Wilma, when her husband died suddenly from an aneurysm. "That said it all," Alvina wrote.

Barbara from St. Paul, who suffered a miscarriage, was comforted by a phone call from a co-worker named Jay. He said: "We are so sorry about your miscarriage. We were really looking forward to the baby and feel sad about it."

Harriet, from Minnesota, was comforted by a friend from church, Karen, who came to visit her a few days after she returned home from her mother's funeral. "She simply said, 'I came to cry with you.'"

Alberta, from Kansas, received comfort from the visits of her pastor, Gregory, after her husband's death. Alberta wrote: "Nearly a year after my husband died, I still cried when talking about him. Pastor said, 'You miss him, don't you? It's OK to cry.'"

Phyllis, also from Minnesota, was grateful for what her friend Iona said when her child was diagnosed with multiple

He said: "We are so sorry about your miscarriage. We were really looking forward to the baby and feel sad about it."

Jesus Wept

anne, I thought of all that I should say to you, but then I thought that I would just tell you that I love you."

sclerosis: "This must be very hard for you. I don't know much about this condition. Could you explain it to me?"

When Eleanor's husband died suddenly from a heart attack, "Tone, a friend at church, listened to me, and comforted me, saying, 'I loved him too.'"

Henrietta, a pastor in Illinois, was grateful for the words of her uncle, also an ELCA pastor, after her father died. He said, "No matter how many funerals you do or people you help while they are grieving, it's a different ballgame when it's your father."

Anne, a pastor from Pennsylvania, wrote that she had never felt "the isolating power of death" until her 21-year-old brother—"a bright, sensitive, caring individual"—took his own life. "John's death happened as I was finishing my first year in the ministry," Anne explained. "I was full of energy and enthusiasm. But the chaos that came as I learned of my brother's death sent me into a far different world. . . ."

On her first Sunday back after the funeral, Anne wrote that "Some chose not to say anything about my brother's death. That brought a new pain inside me. As much as I tried to do my pastoral duties that morning, I felt empty and lost."

But as she turned around, there stood Barbara, a woman in the congregation who had known many struggles in her life. She walked toward me and said, "Anne, I thought of all that I should say to you, but then I thought that I would just tell you that I love you."

Tears came "showering forth—but something very crucial had happened," Anne wrote. "Immersed in the isolating power of death, broken by the chaos that had tossed me to and fro, her words crossed over the darkness and reminded me that I was not alone. There still was great pain, there still was immeasurable loss, but there was someone who dared to speak a word that brought comfort and hope."

Anne concluded her letter: "I was reminded of the words we hear on Christmas Eve from the gospel of John: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.' Thanks be to God for the light of Christ that continues to shine and remind us that we do not suffer alone." ■

Phyllis Kersten is vice president for communications at the Wheat Ridge Foundation. The third and final article in this series will appear in the October LWT.

God is like . . . ◆◆

Wings

Morris O. Wee



At night I sing to my children. The hymn I sing most is the one we sang at each of their baptisms:

*Thy holy wings O Savior,
spread gently over me
and let me rest securely
through good and ill in Thee.*

This hymn, "Thy Holy Wings" by Swedish composer Caroline Sandell, develops the image of God's wings—wings that protect. The psalmist writes: "All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings" (Psalm 36:7b). Jesus speaks of his own protecting wings when he says, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem. . . How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37).

God's wings also deliver. After the Exodus, God tells the Israelites, "You have seen . . . how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exodus 19:4).

And God's wings set free. As they enter the promised land, Moses tells the people, "As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the Lord alone guided [Israel]" (Deuteronomy 32:11-12). God is like an eagle pushing its young from the nest so they will learn to fly, then swooping under to catch them.

Further, God's wings renew. In his well-known poem "God's Grandeur,"

Gerard Manley Hopkins laments soiling of creation. He concludes that, nevertheless, God continues to renew the world:

*And though the last lights
off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown
brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost
over the bent
World broods with warm breath
and with ah! bright wings.*

In the poem the sunrise renews the bright wings of the Holy Ghost, protecting its "brood," the whole "bent world," and brings the world to nurture and new life.

May this be our prayer, that God's wings protect, deliver, free, and renew the world. And may we know the same blessing of life under the wings that I feel as I hold my sleeping son and sing,

*O close thy wings around me
and keep me safely there
For I am but a newborn
and need thy tender care. ■*

"Thy Holy Wings" translated by Grace Grindal. Text copyright © 1983 Grace Grindal. Used by permission.

Morris Wee lives with his wife, Kristine Carlson, and three sons in Northfield, Minnesota, where he is pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church. In the coming months this column will explore a variety of biblical images of God.



How to Spend Our Money? Stewardship Story of Love

Betty Lee Nyhus

The Women of Love Lutheran Church are ecstatic; the year's offerings have come in well over their projected budget. They are especially happy because their personal—and organizational—giving reflects a real commitment to stewardship.

Now, Women of Love Lutheran is a "hollyanna" group. The board of Women of Love has had more than its share of tough meetings over important and not-so-important issues. The board meeting a year ago was particularly difficult. The agenda seemed simple enough: allocate money for gifts.

Janifer recommended that the money be divided equally among the 11 agencies. Kym noted a new need for homeless people that she'd help. "And don't forget the money for the pave-the-parking-lot fund," said Nina.

Then Nancy, the newest board

member, asked "How do we decide how to use the money?" This led to other questions: "Wouldn't it be better to give larger gifts to fewer places?" "Why do the women give money to the parking-lot fund?" "How can we respond to the many local needs and still support the whole women's organization?"

After much discussion, the board decided not to decide—that night, anyway. Two board meetings and one general meeting later, with input from participants, Women of Love Lutheran Church adopted the following guidelines:

1. As Women of the ELCA at Love Lutheran Church, we commit ourselves to be stewards of God's gracious gifts. We remember 2 Corinthians 9:8: "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having

enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." We therefore choose to "empty" Love Women's checkbook at the end of each year, as an act of trust.

2. Understanding that our offerings, united with the gifts of others, are a powerful witness, we pledge to support strongly the synodical and churchwide expressions of our women's organization. Thankofferings will be received quarterly and forwarded to the churchwide office. We will support one to two specific ministries of the ELCA and Women of the ELCA through Designated Gifts annually. Sixty percent of all other income, or \$1000, whichever is greater, shall go to our synodical women's organization on a regular basis.*

3. Remaining monies shall be distributed according to the following guidelines:

- Does this expenditure support the purpose, aims and principles of Women of the ELCA?
- Is this the responsibility of Women of Love Lutheran, or is this more appropriately supported through our church funds?
- Does it enable our unit to be involved in faith and mission, in outreach, in social action, in witness to our church, local and global community?
- Is our contribution needed? Does the request represent a ministry opportunity for our unit, or is it simply someone's "favorite cause"?

Using their guidelines, Women of Love Lutheran Church decided to support a variety of ministries. Because they consider attracting younger women a priority, they de-

cided to offer scholarships for the synodical women's organization convention to three younger women. They also gave Lutheran Woman day gift subscriptions to young women confirmands.

Among other programs, they decided to support women and children in poverty through a family therapy program. And because the pave-the-parking-lot fund seemed best supported through the wider congregation, the women offered to work with the property committee and the congregation to develop a plan to meet this need.

Based on the guidelines, Women of Love Lutheran also responded to many requests for money. Among others, they did not contribute to the community park committee or even the hospital auxiliary (this saddened Nancy, who serves on that board too.) Saying no to good causes was difficult, especially with guidelines to follow.

Your congregational unit may share similar challenges to those of the fictional Women of Love Lutheran Church. Not all of the requests received can or should be supported. Your unit will want to ask—and answer—for themselves "How do we, guided by God, choose ministries to support financially?" ■

Betty Lee Nyhus has been active in church women's circles for over 30 years. She is director of design for giving for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She served as first executive director of Women of the ELCA.

**Delegates to Women of the ELCA's 1992 Triennial Convention voted to encourage congregational units to give 50 percent more of their offerings toward the work of the entire organization.*



Beyond the Corner of the Hankie

Jenine E. Jordahl

Women impress me with their understanding of stewardship. Our foremothers saw needs in their congregations and in the world. Their commitment to respond to those needs was symbolized in part by the money they brought to give—often tied tightly in the corner of their handkerchiefs.

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erence.

Holders of those hankies had the audacity to dream dreams, and to believe that their offerings could make a difference. They saw the gospel spreading out from the corner of their hankie.

From that vision, that audacity, a women's organization was born. While the view of ministry in the 20th century is somewhat different because our worldview has broadened, the commitment and energy for mission continue.

Women today have different choices and a wider arena of influence than did their foremothers. Responding to the call of the gospel today, women in congregational units give time to minister in food pantries, Bible studies, shelters for victims of domestic violence, prayer groups, quilting groups, hospices and support groups.

In addition to this time and energy focused on communities, Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gathers in cluster/conference

groups and synodical organizations to celebrate gifts they share and share the gifts they bring together they find new opportunities for ministry, enabling and empowering one another for greater joy and service.

Whenever women gather, they offer monetary gifts as well. These gifts are and above their regular church offerings. These gifts expand dreams into realities. How does this happen? Let's look at the process.

Some of the money contributed might remain in the area where it is donated to cover specific needs and ministries determined by the local group. Some is given to the Synodical Women's Organization. Thankofferings and Designated Gifts travel directly to the churchwide office of Women of the ELCA where they are appropriately allocated.

Through generous contributions, women in congregational units enable the organization to present an annual gift of money to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—expressing the women's partnership in, and unity with, the church. In 1990 the gift amounted to \$1,275,000—money that the ELCA used to support domestic and global ministries.

Some of the money contributed travels through synodical women's organization budgets to the churchwide office. There, on the seventh floor of 8765 W. Higgins Road in Chicago, in rented space with lights and telephones that cost money, salaried staff members develop and shape programs and resources on our behalf.

Together, all expressions of Women of the ELCA (churchwide, synodical and congregational) are charged with the ministry of empowering women in the church to live out their calling as disciples. Since the needs of women across the nation are heterogeneous, Women of the ELCA responds by providing opportunities for women to grow in faith, develop leadership potential, make an impact on society by building caring communities, and participate in events designed to raise awareness and motivate to action.

Individuals deeply committed to ministry to women have also had the foresight to invest monies in ways that keep on giving. For instance, trust and memorial funds have been established. Interest on these investments provides scholarships amounting to \$27,528 in 1990, which are given to mature women returning to school to improve their

**Individuals
deeply
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and by
women have
had the
foresight to
invest monies
in ways that
keep on
giving.**

and better live out their discipleship. In addition, grants and financial support in the amount of \$742 were given in 1990 to agencies and organizations who serve and empower women worldwide. Our forebears' dreams of "spreading the gospel" took on new meaning in the summer of 1990 as the first phase of our Woman to Woman program brought 27 women from 25 countries to visit in synods and congregations for six weeks. In 1991 and 1992, 27 Women of the ELCA will make visits to synods of the same partner churches. New understandings and insights into the global community, appreciation of the diversity of gifts and strengths that result from interdependence, are gained by those whose lives have been touched by this program. An important fact to remember: the givers who make exciting programs happen are, themselves, women. Their sense of stewardship includes far more than their money. In tight economic times it is important to remember there is no dearth of "people power" in our congregations. And where there is people power, there is no such thing as limited resources.

Women of the ELCA continue to believe that we can make a difference in the world. Change can occur because we dare to dream dreams and empower women for discipleship into the next century. A community of women, created in God's image, empowered by God's spirit, committed to grow in faith, affirm gifts and support one another, moves forward with the audacity and faith of our foremothers.

Where the gifts come—whether from the corner of the checkbook, the family paycheck, a pay envelope or a Social Security check. And these gifts, given with thankful, generous hearts, are blessed by God and reach places and meet needs unknown to the givers—promoting healing and wholeness in the church, the society and the world. ■

Barbara Jordahl, Westby, Wisconsin, currently serves as president of Women of the ELCA. A social worker at Bethel Home and Services, Viroqua, Wisconsin, and an active volunteer, she is a member of Viroqua-Coon Prairie Lutheran Church.

**The givers
who help
exciting
programs
happen are,
themselves,
women.**



MISSION:

Growth

Time and Stewardship

Gail, can you do the decorations for the dinner next week? Mom, I need two new Number 2 pencils for the tests at school tomorrow. Maria, can you work overtime to finish this project tonight? Pamela, dear, can you stay with grandpa while I do some shopping on Saturday?

Does your life sometimes sound like this? As women in today's world, we are torn by conflicting demands on our time. By the time we respond to the needs of work, family and friends, there is no time for renewal.

The result of too much giving and not enough re-creation is the feeling that there is nothing left to give. Mental health professionals call it burnout. We hear a lot about the stress of too much to do. And we experience it when relationships falter because of lack of time, when our bodies rebel because we do not get enough rest, and when our relationship with God is put on the back burner.

Martin Luther is credited with saying that he had so much to do that he had to get up extra early to have time to pray about it all. He believed that the time spent in prayer helped him respond to the demands on his time. But simply saying, "Get up early and pray" is not going to solve the problem of too many conflicting demands.

One way to help is to consciously define the roles we have—mother,

daughter, homemaker, wife, friend, employee, volunteer. And for each of those roles, spend some time in prayer asking for guidance in determining just how much time and energy are available to give. It may be that some things have to be deferred to this point in life to allow time for other things. Or it may be that help is needed to respond to an area of need.

Beginning each day by evaluating the tasks ahead, and asking God's help with each one, will help sort out the many demands and enable us to focus our time and energy.

The important thing is to determine those things that are important and to respond to them first. (Remember that often what is urgent is not what's important.)

Luther's model can work for you. Beginning each day by evaluating the tasks ahead, and asking God's help with each one, will help sort out the many demands and enable us to focus our time and energy. There is never enough time to do everything, but with God's help we can make time to do the important things.

*Patricia Roberts
Director for Leadership Development*

MISSION:

Action

A Friday Morning

a Friday morning at ROAR (Read Out And Read), a parent and literacy/parenting skills program at Augustana Lutheran Church in Hyde Park, Chicago.

I arrive, I see only tutors. Who are the participants?

Q did not come because someone had a shot into her house at her apartment during the night; the family has to figure out how to move elsewhere today.

Q wants very much to come but his car, which Y has been told is not working, has been put on a bus and is expected to arrive in Chicago "sometime" today.

Q really wants to come, but her car is broken and is expecting a very expensive musical instrument to be delivered and she has to remain at home to accept the delivery.

Q has a new weekend job and can't dare arrive late for work.

Some of these students called in to tell us of their absence with regret. They are sorry to miss today, when the group planned to share their personal collections with each other. Besides, their lives are interdependent, for tutors and students have to care and be concerned for one another.

Q is the first participant to arrive. She has brought her collection with her and shares a wealth of knowledge about it. It is clear she is able to learn mounds about what inter-

ests her. Why wasn't she plugged into the joys of reading early in life?

Out of breath, Q arrives saying she asked a neighbor to do her an enormous favor and take in the instrument. She brings a collection that

Students and tutors have come to care and be concerned for one another.

displays obvious artistic talent. What turned her off from reading in school?

The conversation around the table is lively, energetic, spontaneous! When it is time to quit, no one wants to. S will bring more of her collection next week. Q invites everyone to her apartment Friday to view the rest of her large collection.

It's a Friday morning at ROAR. And in sharing the problems and the joys and the "stuff" of life, literacy happens. ■

For further information about ROAR, see "Two R's: Reading and Relationships" in the September 1990 Lutheran Woman Today, or call the Director for Literacy at 800-638-3522, extension 2736.

*Faith Fretheim
Director for Literacy*

MISSION:

Community

Where Your Offerings Go

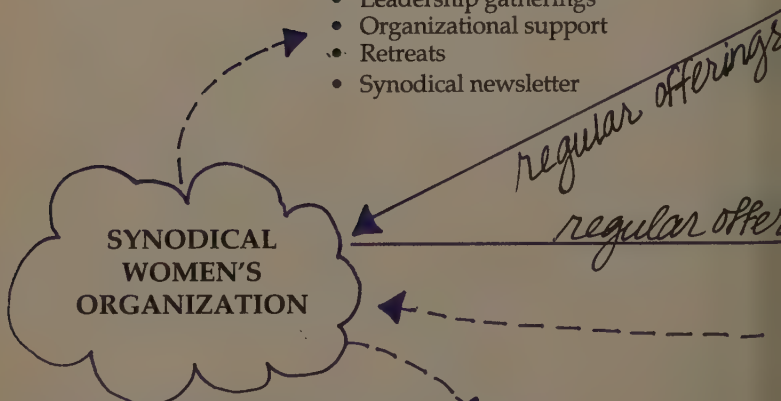
Offerings reflect relationships. With our offerings of money, we express our joy and gratitude for God's love and mercy and also support a variety of ministries in the global community. This diagram does not reflect all of our relationships, but is a broad overview of where your offerings go and how they are used.

Bonnie

Director for Communication and Stewardship Interpretation

Resources for congregational units and participants

- Cluster/conference events
- Conventions
- Leadership gatherings
- Organizational support
- Retreats
- Synodical newsletter



SYNODICAL
WOMEN'S
ORGANIZATION

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Synodical ministries

- Ecumenical liaisons
- Ministries in the synod
- Synod council participation
- Synodical liaisons



LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

Congregational unit ministries

- Affirmation of women
- Family, ecumenical and cross-cultural relations
- Leadership development
- Local ministries
- Ministries in the congregation
- Programs and events
- Service projects
- Working for justice

KEY:

Solid lines show offerings given. Dotted lines show how offerings are used to provide resources and ministries.

CONGREGATIONAL
UNIT
INDIVIDUAL
PARTICIPANTS

Resources for congregational units and participants

- Bible studies
- Evangelism and stewardship resources
- Leadership development resources
- Literacy resources
- *Lutheran Woman Today*
- One in Christ events
- One in Christ speakers bureau
- Program resources
- Scholarships
- Theological conferences
- Triennial convention and workshops
- *Women of the ELCA Newsletter*

CHURCHWIDE
WOMEN'S
ORGANIZATION

Resources for synodical women's organizations

- Board representation at conventions
- Leadership gatherings
- One in Christ events
- Press releases
- Support for clusters/conferences
- Support for mission areas
- Woman to Woman
- *Women of the ELCA Newsletter*

Churchwide ministries

- Ecumenical relations
- ELCA ministries (for example, world hunger, missionary support)
- Gift to the ELCA
- Grants for development of human resources
- Women of the ELCA ministries

The

Design of Designated Gifts

Bonnie Belasic

Design. Designate. These words trigger images of organization: plan and pattern, creativity, deliberate action. Designated gifts are an essential part of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's plan to carry out its purpose.

Each year Women of the ELCA highlights specific ministries of the entire church, as well as of the women's organization, for which gifts may be designated over and above regular offerings.

During 1991, Women of the ELCA highlights for designated gifts 13 specific ministries of the ELCA and 9 Women of the ELCA-related ministries (see pp. 41-42). Women of the ELCA is committed to giving \$500,000 in 1991 to the ELCA designated ministries, and these monies will be given to the ELCA as part of a special offering titled "Women of the ELCA Gift to the Church."

The "design" of these designated gifts recognizes the commitment of women to the ministry of the whole church, their zeal for the gospel, and their global perspective as they consider the needs of people and opportunities for response.

Opportunities for designated gifts for ministries of the ELCA

A World Hunger Appeal	
Program No. 555	\$100,000
Dictionary Support	
Program No. 570	\$100,000
Overseas Scholarships	
Program No. 572	\$50,000
Community Outreach Coordinator, Savannah, Georgia	
Program No. 575	\$12,000
Conference for Women Faculty ELCA Seminaries	
Program No. 576	\$3,000
Investing Our Potential Conference	
Program No. 577	\$2,000
Health Care, Liberia	
Program No. 578	\$50,000
Leadership Development Africa	
Program No. 579	\$32,000
Heran Center for Lay Ministry Coordinator, Region 8	
Program No. 580	\$25,000
Ministry among Struggling Nations, Central and South America	
Program No. 581	\$75,000
Grant for ELCA Women in Graduate Studies or Teaching Theological Disciplines	
Program No. 582	\$5,000
Local Response Coordinators—Winnipeg, Minnesota, Iowa	
Program No. 583	\$21,000
Unit on Evangelism—Africa and Asia	
Program No. 584	\$25,000



Gifts designated for women and children in poverty can help to feed children who might otherwise go to bed hungry.

Opportunities for designated gifts for specific ministries of Women of the ELCA

Campaign in Support of Women in Namibia	
Program No. 527	\$40,000
Women and Children in Poverty	
Program No. 528	\$40,000
Scholarships to Theological Conferences	
Program No. 529	\$6,000
Integrity of Creation Conference Resources	
Program No. 585	\$5,000
Scholarships to Evangelism Events	
Program No. 586	\$5,000
Stewardship Consultation for Business Owners and Managers	
Program No. 587	\$35,000
Supporting Families in the '90s	
Program No. 588	\$5,000

The Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women, 1988-1998

Program No. 589 \$5,000

Volunteer Reading Aides (Literacy)

Program No. 590 \$35,000

Creativity by Design

Have you ever gotten so excited about an opportunity that you couldn't keep it to yourself? Your enthusiasm for designated gifts can help women—and others—in your congregation get excited about spreading God's good news. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Share the list** of the designated gifts with participants in your congregation. Print the list in the bulletin, newsletter, or on poster board. Ask individuals and/or families to choose one or more ministries to support.

- **On a large map**, mark the locations where designated gifts will make a difference in people's lives. As people contribute to a specific ministry, pin their names to the appropriate area of the map.

- **Regularly include** these ministries in the prayers of the church on Sunday mornings.

- **Give "temple talks"** several times during the year describing one or more of these opportunities for designated giving.

- **Ask older adults** and children to design a container, or plan an event, for receiving designated gifts.

- **Hang a globe** in your narthex with a banner that reads, "Designated gifts circle the globe with care."

- **Invite a missionary**, or someone who has visited a country that needs designated gifts, to share her or his

experience, slides, or display of it from that country.

Purposeful Design

The word *designate* implies and requires action. Responding to ministry opportunities and needs with designated gifts is one way to creatively carry out Women of the ELCA purposes.

Design. Designate. Designate gifts: a way to support specific ministries for the sake of the gospel.

May God bless the gifts of those who give and those who receive. Amen. ■

Bonnie Belasic serves the church as director for communications and stewardship interpretation for Women of the ELCA.

For more information

about the ministries to receive designated gifts in 1991, see the Designated Gifts for Specific Ministries of Women of the ELCA 1991 brochure (code 68-9047) and the 1991 Gift to the Church brochure (code 68-904). Multiple copies of the brochures may be ordered free of charge, except postage and a \$3.25 handling fee per order, from ELCA Distribution Services, 1-800-328-4648.

Send designated gifts

Women of the ELCA, 8765 Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189. Make checks payable to "Women of the ELCA" with the program number noted on the check.

THANKOFFERINGS

Each In, Each Out

nie Belasic

decessor women's organization provided this verse on its offering box:

daily gift, a daily prayer. That the world Christ may share."

When we think about Thankofferings as one expression of our stewardship, the three components of this can provide insights into why Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America encourages offerings.

Daily gift

Blessings of God are all around the offering box used by many. It provides a way to acknowledge God's presence and activity in life. Robin rides her bike to church. Each day when she arrives safely, she puts a quarter into the Thankoffering box on top of the generator. Ingrid is aging rapidly and still moves about with a walker. She daily adds a dime to the Thankoffering box. Kim has two healthy children who are exploring stairs, curbs and corners. Her Thankoffering box registers her delight in the two gifts of God.



A daily prayer

Thank you, gracious God, for safe bike rides, for bodies that adapt to age and for children who make everyday things so special. As Robin, Ingrid and Kim make their daily offering, it is made with prayerful thankfulness. A daily offering is a gentle reminder to recall God's gifts with thanks.

That all the world Christ may share

Thankofferings provide an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. When Thankofferings leave your hands, they are sent to the churchwide Women of the ELCA for use in one of two ways:

■ in support of the triennial emphasis of Women of the ELCA—programs and projects for women and children in poverty, or

■ in support of the total outreach of the ELCA through the women's organization special contribution titled "Gift to the Church."

Through your Thankofferings you

will reach in—to discover and give thanks for God's blessings in your life—and reach out—to provide programs of witness, nurture, justice, unity, leadership and mutual support in mission.

In 1991, your Thankofferings will support ministries like these:

Ministries carried out by Women of the ELCA

- Ministries for and with women and children in poverty.

Ministries carried out by the ELCA

- Village development in Central African Republic
- Supporting leaders through continuing education
- Resources for day-care and preschool teachers
- Ministries for women and children in poverty
- Nutrition and housing advocacy
- Outreach among women in India
- International scholarships for women church leaders

- Theological education in Hong Kong

- Leadership development with Namibian students

- Relating ecumenically with college students

- Children growing in stewardship: the Peli-can project

- Communicating through public media

- Health and agriculture ministries in Peru.

Reach in and reach out with your Thankofferings. Send checks made payable to "Women of the ELCA" to Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189. ■

Bonnie Belasic, Director for Communication and Stewardship Interpretation, Women of the ELCA

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Stewardship Retreat

"Money, Security and Spirituality: Exploring the Activity of God in Our Lives" is the name of a new retreat opportunity for Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This event provides a supportive environment for women to explore who they are as women, as women of faith, and as women of faith with wealth of varying degrees and configurations.

Do you see yourself as not "having money"? Are you responsible for managing family money? Does money affect your security? Your self-esteem? Your faith? How do the values you hold about faith and money conflict with, or support, the other?

What are the questions with which you struggle related to faith, security and money?

If these questions touch you, this is your event. It has no age other than to help you explore the activity of God in your life as it relates to money, security and spirituality—through Bible study, worship, silent times to listen to God, group interaction and guided discussion. For more specific information on this event, scheduled for November 14-15 at St. Mary College in Leavenworth, Kansas (not far from Kansas City), write: MSS Event, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189.—BB

A Thankoffering

Our Smallest Gift Is Blessed

Karen Parsons

Leader: God blesses us with every good gift and multiplies the seed we sow.

All: Thanks and praise be to God!

Leader: The surpassing grace of God is in you.

All: Thanks and praise be to God!

Hymn (*sung by all or soloist*):

“O God, You Hear Our Every Prayer” by Jane Parker Huber.* Sung to the tune “Rest” (see *Lutheran Book of Worship* 506).

- 1 O God, you hear our every prayer,
Whate'er our land or tongue.
We join with others everywhere
In praise of you, our gifts to share,
Wherever songs are sung.
- 2 Our weakness is made strong in you.
Our smallest gift is blessed.
Our vision, stretched to worldwide view,
Gives us a larger family too,
To meet life's every test.
- 3 Our partnership, sealed by our Lord,
Empowers our will this day.
Together we move onward toward
A world renewed, of one accord,
In joyful work and play.
- 4 So may our prayers fill every hour
And never, never cease,
Refreshing as a summer shower
To bring from bud to fullest flower
Your perfect will of peace.

*Text copyright © 1981 Jane Parker Huber from A Singing Faith. Used by permission of Westminster/John Knox Press.

A THANKOFFERING

Reading: Psalm 138, New Revised Standard Version (*read responsively with the reader, alternating verses.*)

- 1 I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
- 2 I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love
and your faithfulness;
for you have exalted your name and your word
above everything.
- 3 On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my strength of soul.
- 4 All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord,
for they have heard the words of your mouth.
- 5 They shall sing of the ways of the Lord,
for great is the glory of the Lord.
- 6 For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.
- 7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
you stretch out your hand,
and your right hand delivers me.
- 8 The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

All sing: Stanza 1 of "O God, You Hear Our Every Prayer"

Leader: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Leader: O God, you who hear our every prayer, listen with kindness as we offer our thanks and praise. Even in the midst of trouble, you bless us with your steadfast love. We sing of your glories, O Lord; your glories are great. Amen.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

All sing: Stanza 2 of "O God, You Hear Our Every Prayer"

Leader: We praise you, God, for your faithfulness. We thank you for your grace which we have received so abundantly through Jesus Christ, and for the blessings that strengthen us. Continue to stretch our vision that we might embrace your whole creation. Amen.

Reading: Romans 12:4-5
John 13:34-35

All sing: Stanza 3 of "O God, You Hear Our Every Prayer"

A THANKOFFERING

Leader: God, we praise you and thank you for the wonderful way in which love builds us up and makes us whole. We thank you for the gifts of each person here and we ask your blessing on these gifts, that as they are used to strengthen the body of Christ, love will go forth from here, in one accord, to share your love with the world. Amen.

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

All sing: Stanza 4 of "O God, You Hear Our Every Prayer"

Leader: For the refreshing gift of prayer, O God, we give you thanks. We thank you that in your abundant love you have given us the confidence of trusting your presence in our lives. Bless us with hearts filled with thankfulness and joy. Amen.

Offering Litany

Leader: Let us be joyful givers.

All: We come with joy to give from the abundance of God's blessings to us!

Leader: Let us be prayerful givers.

All: We come with the confidence that God answers our prayers.

Leader: Let us be thankful givers.

All: We come to give thanks for all of life.

Offering: (*The Thankofferings may be brought forward, or collected and brought forward.*)

Hymn (*all sing*): "O God, You Hear Our Every Prayer"

Closing Prayer (*All*): O God, you *do* hear our every prayer . . . and for that we give you our humble thanks. Unite us, we pray, to live as the body of Christ in our world that your love may abound.

For every blessing you give us in abundance we give you thanks . . . and we pray that we may know the joy of sharing abundantly in every good thing.

In the name of Jesus, the giver of abundant life, we pray. Amen.

Leader: Go in peace, serve the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God! ■

The Rev. Karen Parsons is pastor of a yoked parish in the southern suburbs of Chicago: House of Prayer in Country Club Hills and Holy Trinity in Matteson.

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My Prayer of Thanksgiving

Reflect on the words of Scripture used in the Thankoffering program (see pages 45 to 47 of this issue). Allow these passages inspire your own prayers of thanksgiving and praise. (You wish to write your prayers in the spaces available here.)

Read Psalm 138. How have you experienced God's steadfast love, even in the midst of troubles? What does "great is the power of the Lord" mean to you?

My prayer of thanksgiving: God, your glory is great; I praise you for . . .

Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9. How have you been enriched and strengthened because of the grace of God given you in Christ Jesus?

My prayer of thanksgiving: Thank you, loving Lord, for all that sustain me: gifts of . . .

Read Romans 12:4-5 and John 13:34-35. How has Christ's community (church, circle, family) supported you, helped you grow in faith?

My prayer of thanksgiving: God of one, God of all, I remember with thankfulness your faithful servant(s) . . .

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Are there circumstances in your life that make it difficult for you to be thankful? When is it easier to be thankful? When is it tougher? How are you blessed? What caused you to rejoice recently?

My prayer of thanksgiving: Alleluia! With joy I offer thanksgiving and praise for . . .

With praise and thanksgiving I recall your abundant goodness, O God, and ask that the blessings and gifts you grant strengthen me for your service. In the name of Jesus, source of abundant life, Amen. ■

*The Rev. Karen Paxson
Country Club Hills, Ill.*

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“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”

Luke 21:3-4

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